New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1948

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**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of March 1, 1948*

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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS — NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK MIRROR — NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK SUN — NEW YORK POST — NEW YORK TIMES

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"Me and Molly"

The New York Times

February 27, 1948

Gertrude Berg Brings Some of the Goldbergs to the Belasco Stage in 'Me and Molly'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Having chronicled the Goldbergs over the radio for sixteen years, Gertrude Berg has brought some of them on the stage in "Me and Molly," acted at the Belasco last evening. Although her theatre script is about as artless as you are likely to find out of the amateur theatre, the artlessness is genuine and her family drama makes no pretentions to literature. Mrs. Berg, who also plays Mrs. Goldberg, is a large woman with a pleasant face and apparently a very warm heart as well. For the friendliness of her play and the simplicity of her characters are disarming and enjoyable. Imagine "Awake and Sing" without the backing of Karl Marx and you have some notion of Mrs. Berg's drama of domesticity in the Bronx of 1919.

* * *

Technically, this is the story of Jake Goldberg, a family man, who wants to go into the dress business for himself. He thinks there is something unmanly about working for somebody else. Mrs. Berg manages to run the thread of the plot through her rambling narrative and make a triumphant climax out of it for the curtain.

But what interests her more is the family life of the Goldbergs, who are very decent people. The substance of "Me and Molly" is compounded of many family simplicities—moving into a new family apartment, buying a piano, music lessons, match-making, borrowing a cup of sugar, dress making on a form, religious devotions, school and gossip.

* * *

If Mrs. Berg were a more professional playwright, "Me and Molly" would be shorter, which would be an improvement, but would doubtless be condescending. The sentimentalities would be mawkish and the dialect satiric. But Mrs. Berg seems to be writing on the same level as her characters, with normal respect for them as human beings and with a genuine interest in family affairs. The result is a leisurely, intimate, cheerful portrait of interesting people, and the humor is kind-hearted. It is something for a playwright to preserve that much personal integrity amid the gag-traps of Broadway.

* * *

To put the Goldbergs in their place, Harry Horner has designed a skeletonized apartment surrounded with Bronx family buildings. Under Ezra Stone's appreciative direction, the performance is good-humored and full of local color. Mrs. Berg acts Mrs. Goldberg as she has written the play—with a wholesome frankness and instinctive good-will. Always a good actor, but seldom on the stage, Philip Loeb plays the part of Jake Goldberg with conviction and variety; he makes something real out of the hope and despair of an obscure, self-respecting family man.

There are agreeable performances in most of the parts, particularly by Eli Mintz as a devoted uncle. David Opatoshu as a timid bachelor, Margaret Feury as a music teacher who would like to be married and Louis Sorin as an overbearing business success act their parts attractively; and there are a host of neighbors and children constantly streaming through the play.

'ME AND MOLLY.'

Comedy by Gertrude Berg; staged by Ezra Stone; setting by Harry Horner; music arranged by Lehman Engel; costumes by Rose Bogdanoff; lighting by Leo Kerz; presented by Paul Feigay, Oliver Smith and Herbert Kenwith, in association with David Cummings at the Belasco Theater Thursday evening, February 26, 1948. The cast:

Max	Harry Lazeo
Joe	Michael Bauerys
Mrs. S-C	Paula Miller
Hymie	Arthur Cassel
Benty	Charles Furman
Milty	Herbie Hahn
Molly Goldberg	Gertrude Berg
Uncle David	Eli Mintz
Sammy Goldberg	Lester Carr
Rosie Goldberg	Joan Lazer
Mrs. Siegel	Bertha Walden
Jake Goldberg	Philip Loeb
Cousin Simon	Louis Sorin
Mr. Mandel	David Opatoshu
Vera Wertheimer	Margaret Feury
Frieze Man	George Spelvin
Mrs. Gross	Sarah Krohner
Mike	David Burke
Mrs. S-C	Bessie Samoss Blumstein
Jessie	Phyllis Liverman
Mrs. Ellenbogen	Sally Scherr

SYNOPSIS: The action takes place in an apartment in the Bronx. The year is 1919. Act I, Scene 1—An afternoon in February. Scene 2—An evening, three weeks later. Scene 3—Several days later. Act II, Scene 1—An afternoon in April. Scene 2—Several weeks later. Scene 3—An evening, mid-summer. Act III—A Saturday in September.

No wonder the Goldbergs have been popular on the radio. Mrs. Berg is a real human being who believes in the people she writes about and is not ashamed of their simplicity.

New York Post

February 27, 1948

The Goldberg Family In 'Me and Molly'

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

The comedy called "Me and Molly," which Gertrude Berg has based on her popular radio series, "The Goldbergs," has several obvious superiorities that place it far beyond the once popular "Abie's Irish Rose" school of humor. Its people are warm and human, and they are worth cherishing. Their everyday adventures have reality about them, and their laughter can be rich and nourishing. There is nothing patronizing or vaudeville or comic strip in the author's affectionate regard for her characters, and the life she depicts never loses its essential dignity. With so many virtues, it is particularly disappointing to find the play as a whole no more satisfactory than it seemed at the Belasco last night.

Several reasons come to mind at once for the final weakness of "Me and Molly." As Clifford Odets proved in his memorable "Awake and Sing," these simple tales of the joys and sorrows of Jewish family life in an American city can be eloquently beautiful as well as humorous and moving. But Odets also showed that the poet's touch and the artist's brooding compassion should go along with the dramatist's observation. While Mrs. Berg provides the observation and the sense of reality, she is too concerned with the proper number of laughs and sighs to save her play, with all its good qualities, from seeming essentially mechanical.

The Husband

In addition, "Me and Molly" suffers from that familiar article of the playwright's credo which insists that all husbands are imbeciles and survive only because of the intelligence and tolerance of their wives. This may or may not be true, but it has its defects as a plot device. Mrs. Berg is filled to overflowing with human kindness, but once she glances at Molly Goldberg's husband something happens to it. Apparently she felt that to make Molly properly winning she must make Jake unlovable. The result is that, while all the other Goldbergs are charming, Jake is a sour, selfish, ill-tempered lout, with few saving graces. It can't be that the author disapproves of men, because Uncle David is as enchanting a fellow as you could meet. But Jake is a nuisance.

Finally, it takes an exceptional gift to write of men and women who live dramatically drab and humdrum lives and not make the result a little too realistically dull for comfort. In telling of the Goldbergs' day by day existence in the year of grace 1919, Mrs. Berg provides much agreeable humor and a few moments of sadness, but her play does seem to go on and on, and I regret to say that, in the end, I found the effect of "Me and Molly" enervating. It may not have been fair of me to compare it to "Awake and Sing," but Mrs. Berg has just enough skill to make the comparison tempting.

Although the usually expert Philip Loeb is bogged down in the role of the father, most of the acting is just what it should be. In particular, Mrs. Berg plays the mother with genuine warmth and humor, Eli Muntz is gentle and charming as Uncle David, David Opatoshu gives a fine performance as a shy and serious-minded intellectual, and Joan Lazer proves herself an exceptionally winning child actress as the Goldberg daughter. Ezra Stone's staging is admirable. "Me and Molly" has warmth and humor, but also, I fear, dullness

New York Herald Tribune

February 27, 1948

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY Jr.

Bronx Dialecticians

MAMA, Papa, Samalee and Rosalee Goldberg have stepped out of the ether onto the stage of the Belasco in a new comedy by Gertrude Berg. With the authoress of the radio serial and the play appearing as Molly, "Me and Molly" is a series of family episodes collected into an affectionate picture of life in a Bronx flat in 1919. In this construction it somewhat resembles "I Remember Mama," but the resemblance ends there. These people are pleasant, but they are shallow; the things that happen to them are not keen experiences which open them up and let you see inside the facade of family solidarity, and their conversation, though occasionally amusing, seems to strive for dialect comedy alone. There are a few Bronx colloquialisms with the slightest touch of pathos at the Belasco, but that is all.

* * *

Miss Berg casts herself as a happy, illiterate mother and wife whose duty it is to dissipate childish problems and give deep understand to her ambitious and sometimes trying husband. The latter, played by Philip Loeb, is a garment worker trying to raise capital for his own factory. What plot there is concerns his various failures and eventual success, through an idea of Molly's which he ignores for most of three acts. Meanwhile there are such side issues as a piano for Rosie, who is taking lessons; preparing Sammy for a coming-of-age ceremony, and a love affair between a family friend and a music teacher. Ezra Stone's direction tries to cover the script with little details of family life in a small apartment, and they help a lot. They do not quite substitute for a sharp focus and a clear meaning in a wandering, blurry play.

* * *

Miss Berg's own part is typical

of the script's uncertainty—even though she speaks her mind to a rich cousin at the end, you never truly find Molly out. She cannot sign her own name, she speaks English poorly, she has one good idea about dress sizes and she almost never stops smiling, and these unusual though not particularly revealing characteristics are merely repeated in scene after scene. Loeb's outspoken protests against life also tend to be monotonous, though his performance is an excellent one. The play hits its peak when his son adds an insignificant affront to all of his worries and causes him to blow up. The dialogue is full of such phrases as "your liver is standing on the table, "I'll go put an eye in the soup" or "take off your head" meaning "relieve your mind." This is the humor of the dialect comedian; and although it is colorful, it is does not have a firm basis in character and situation humor in "Me and Molly."

* * *

Joan Lazer is a very pleasant stage child in the character of Rosie; Lester Carr fiddles with earphones and a crystal set as Sammy; Eli Mintz plays an elderly uncle who sits in the parlor and comments on the family's troubles, and the roster of friends and neighbors includes everything from a pretty blonde music teacher to a group of size 60 mothers. The Harry Horner set, reconstructing what appears to be a three room and kitchen apartment, is one of the year's best, stylized and cut away to reveal a large brass bed, heavy red drapes and a stove with real steam, and giving the impression of crowded, closed-in living conditions. One would have to dig hard to find an overall meaning in "Me and Molly"; if any exists, it is that poverty is bearable where there is love and family solidarity. No doubt Miss Berg's pen was motivated by great sympathy and tenderness, but not much of her feeling comes across the footlights in this play.

The Sun

February 27, 1948

'ME AND MOLLY' OPENS AT BELASCO

The Goldbergs of the Bronx, who long ago won fame over the air waves, turned up in the Broadway sector last evening. Even as the curtain rose on "Me and Molly," the comedy their creator Gertrude Berg has concocted for their mid-town visit, a pair of husky stage moving men were unloading their household goods behind the footlights of the Belasco Theater. It will probably be no surprise to their many radio friends to learn that it did not take Molly Goldberg long to get the first-night audience laughing heartily.

Mrs. Berg set quite a chore for herself when she sought to transfer the characters of a popular radio serial to the stage. Events that were amusing in the brief sketches of a broadcast could easily have become tedious when extended over two hours and a half. Aided by some expert direction by Ezra Stone, she has admirably avoided that pitfall. Her idea does wear a trifle thin by the third act, but before the play gets out of hand Molly's neighbors come trooping in in the gay new dresses she has designed to put matters aright. Along its course "Me and Molly" is both funny and touching in turn, and best of all it's very human.

Smith and Feigay, who with Herbert Kenwith and David Cummings sponsored Mrs. Berg's play, state that its story is new though the Goldbergs are not. I, for one, was meeting the fabulous family for the first time. In "Me and Molly" Mrs. Berg carries them from the February afternoon in 1919 when they arrived in their new home in the Bronx until the following September. The slight and unpretentious plot hinges around husband Jake's efforts to set himself up in the dress business. The things that really count are the family incidents arising from Molly's loyal efforts to keep her household on an even keel in the meantime.

Mrs. Berg, of course, portrays Molly, as she did before the microphone, and her acting is a delight. Molly has a heart as ample as her frame, and in Mrs. Berg's playing, she is not only humorous, but understanding and wise as well.

She receives fine support from a big cast. Philip Loeb has the role of Jake, and whether the ambitious father of this family of four is riding the crests of optimism or plunging into the irritable depths of gloom, Loeb is excellent. Lester Carr and Joan Lazer are the Goldberg children, Sammy and Rosie, and to the life, Rosie's childish grief over her father's refusal to buy a piano gives "Me and Molly" one of its best moments.

Uncle David is on hand, of course, and Eli Mintz makes him an amusing figure. David Opatoshu is properly bashful as a young man who favors drug stores over dress shops and Margaret Feury is very natural as the lonesome piano teacher from across the court, who catches his eye.

Harry Horner has devised a realistic cross-section of an uptown apartment of yesteryear for the setting.

After last night, the Goldbergs' Bronx neighbors shouldn't be worried if they are off down town quite a bit in the weeks ahead.

HERRICK BROWN.

Daily Mirror

February 27, 1948

'Me and Molly' Fine, Human Comedy

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Gertrude Berg has brought her popular "Rise of the Goldbergs" radio program to the stage as "Me and Molly." The Berg fans, who run into the thousands, will find it at the Belasco Theatre, which it should be tenanting for quite a spell.

"Me and Molly' has to do with the struggles of a Jewish family to establish its own dress business. Ambitious Jake Goldberg has setbacks and heartbreaks in getting the capital to open his shop. But Molly Goldberg and the two little Goldbergs give him courage when he needs it most.

The year is 1919 and the locale the Bronx, where the Goldbergs have moved from the East Side. One of their early adventures is the discovery of a tree. Another the arrival of a piano for their daughter Rosie. And another the preparation of son Sammy for his Bar Mitzvah.

Mrs. Goldberg has been too busy before moving to the Bronx to learn to read and write English, but she soon joins her neighbors at night school. One of her proudest moments comes when she can sign for the delivery of the piano. And there's much excitement in the Goldberg household as Molly gets ready for a civics test, letter perfect in the duties of Senators and Congressmen.

Mrs. Goldberg was smarter than most of us. At an age when too many of us don't bother, she set about to learn how her government works and how to make it work better. Most of us just don't take the trouble to emulate her example.

"Me and Molly" is a human and amusing comedy about the trials and tribulations of a hard-working, honest, loyal family. It's packed with laughs and decent sentiment. It isn't ashamed to wear its heart on its sleeves, where all can see it. There would be less juvenile delinquency today if more parents gave the care and affection to their children the Goldbergs did.

Mrs. Berg, of course, plays Molly. Plays her with warmth, zest and unsophisticated good humor. Philip Loeb, known to most of us as a breezy comedian, proves that he also can cope admirably with emotion as Jake.

Others in the large cast meriting salutes are Eli Mintz, Lester Carr, Joan Lazer, Henry Lascoe, Paula Miller, Arthur Cassel, Charles Furman, Herbie Hahn, Bertha Walden, Louis Sorin, David Opatoshu, Margaret Feury, Sarah Krohner, Bessie Blumstein and Sally Schorr.

It took a lot of people to produce "Me and Molly": "Smith & Feigay and Herbert Kenwith in association with David Cummings." Whew! Yep, that's what it says in the program. But if it took so many, that's alright with us. They've done a bang up job. So, too, has director Ezra Stone, another radio alumnus. Remember "Henry Aldrich?"

DAILY NEWS

February 27, 1948

'Me and Molly' an Affectionate, Pleasant Bronx Family Comedy

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Since 1929 until recently there was a radio-program about a family named Goldberg, they tell me. Big following, they say—but you wouldn't have caught a smarty like me listening to some serial on the wireless; not up to now. But now I'm sorry for having been so uppity, because last evening I saw a comedy about the same people, called "Me and Molly."

As a piece of playmaking, this new little piece at the Belasco is obvious and not very suspenseful—but it makes up for lightness in weight by its warmth of heart. It is a thoroughly enjoyable visit with the Goldbergs in their new apartment in the Bronx, and I like the whole family and their friends very much. Now that I've been up to see them I'd like to have them come down and see me some time.

Gertrude Berg wrote the comedy and plays the role of Molly. She has done the writing well and she is doing the acting delightfully. Also acting delightfully are Philip Loeb, as the "Me" of the play; Joan Lazer as an exceptionally charming small daughter, and Eli Mintz, Lester Carr, Bertha Walden, Louis Sorin, David Opatoshu, Margaret Feury and many others in the roles of family and neighbors.

Friendly Bickering.

A great many plays about family life have distressed me because their authors have failed to sense when bickering ceases to be funny and becomes unpleasant. Mrs. Berg's Goldbergs have plenty of arguments, goodness knows—but they are saving with their insults. Their differences are human and funny and sometimes violent, but beneath them always is the gentleness that comes of generosity and affection.

The comedy is set in the period of 1919. It could be today, except that it would spoil the plot. The plot, such as it is, concerns the grand ambitions of Jake Goldberg to go into the dress business for himself, and their final realization when Molly devises a half-size pattern so that "a woman can go out of a store without being altered." Even Jake himself comes to realize that Molly has something; with a better-fitting garment, he declaims, the average woman can be made to look more average. This has been accomplished since 1919.

Mrs. Berg's ear for Bronx dialect is as keen as Arthur Kober's, but what she writes is kindly rather than satiric. As the mother of a turbulent household she plays expertly—coddling here, reprimanding there and quietly maneuvering affairs to suit herself. Mr. Loeb makes a perfect Jake—voluble, excitable and a dreamer just as he is supposed to be, but always smart enough not to overdo anything. Mr. Loeb has always been one of my favorite comedians.

Ezra Stone, the director, manages to get a lot of people into and out of a small flat with dexterity, and Harry Horner's cutout setting, with its backdrop of tall tenements, is excellent.

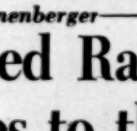
PM Exclusive

February 29, 1948

Kronenberger

Famed Radio Family Takes to the Stage

After some 16 years on the radio, the Goldberg family have finally reached the stage. On the stage their picture of Bronx home life has the warmth its devotees will be expecting of it, and the humor they will demand. It's a picture that calls for some comment. Up to a point, it's not only plausible but real. Up to a point, it's not only amiable but affectionate. The characters have been taken from life, the only question being where they have been taken to. For if *Me and Molly* doesn't offer much in the way of reality, it has a good deal in the way of realism—the drip pan under the icebox; the piano hoisted in through the window. And if Molly Goldberg is much of the time a rather specious Malaprop, she's even more of the time a quite undeniable mother.



* * *

As a picture of a Jewish family in what might be called the second stage of struggle—a struggle not to survive but to get on and get educated—*Me and Molly* follows so broad an economic, social and cultural pattern that you have to go out of your way, you have to milk it purely for tears and laughs, to make it seem false. In the same manner, the Goldbergs' neighbors so little try to be human beings that it would be silly to say that they fail to be; they are pure comic types. And to accomplish this much of her job, Mrs. Berg needs no more than an observant eye, which she has. I won't even add a sensitive ear—for what her people talk is as often stage dialect as human speech.

* * *

With the Goldbergs themselves, however, we look for something more—something that evidences insight as well as eyesight, a writer as well as a reporter. And by getting absolutely nothing more, we feel that we are getting a good deal less. Watching the Goldbergs struggle vainly to be real people rather than standardized blobs of emotion and behavior, we would gladly, after a while, have them less real in exchange for being more robustly unreal, more exuberantly and outrageously comic. But always *Me and Molly* introduces some relentless symbol of realism like the drip pan under the icebox; always, as it veers toward the absurd, it sternly yanks itself back to the average, under the impression that the average is the genuine. But the average, as it turns out, is more often the dull and the flat. For I'm afraid that warm-hearted and observant as she is, Mrs. Berg knows neither how to write, nor how to write a play; so that *Me and Molly* is never interesting for long, even as theater.

* * *

Having gone thus far in analyzing a play that I might more succintly—and more sensibly—have described as a popular-style comedy that I happened to find quite dull, I am tempted to make two or three comments more. "It's certainly true to life," I heard some one say as I was leaving the theater; and it struck me, and not for the first time, how if enough details in a play are recognizable, the whole thing can pass for real. The characters needn't breathe so long as the radiator properly hisses; the emotions can come canned so long as the fruit on the table looks fresh; while, ounce for ounce, averageness is much more convincing than art. And more convincing, for one reason, because it's so much more reassuring: it introduces none of those really ugly or depressing matters that people don't want to be reminded of. In every age people like the Goldbergs have only to appear to be voted wonderfully real, while an entire society denounces Madame Bovary as overdrawn, or Hedda Gabler as incredible, or Hardy's Jude as quite monstrous. Surely none of us would blame them for finding the Goldbergs more fun; must they always find them more real as well?

* * *

Miss Berg is much the kind of actress she is a writer: as Mrs. Goldberg she has warmth and personality and very little skill. But by just being natural in a well-greased role she comes off better than the more professional members of the cast. So very resourceful an actor as Philip Loeb seems to me sunk in the much less ingratiating role of Mr. Goldberg; and most of the other performances, like Ezra Stone's direction, seem routine. Harry Horner's set contributes a good deal to the true-to-likeness.

—Louis Kronenberger

New York World-Telegram

February 27, 1948

'Me and Molly' Brings The Goldbergs to Life

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Anyone who wants to discuss the matter of "pulse of the public" should refer to Gertrude Berg, who wrote and plays the lead in "Me and Molly." Our guess would be that Miss Berg has a reverse transfusion on that pulse that amounts to a pipe line.

Her play is simple and homely, with a few tears and a lot of laughs. It never tries to be smart or original, and is at its best when it is most familiar. What she has done is turn out an "Old Homestead" about the Bronx in 1919, with dialogue as easy to get along with as the block letters in the balloons of a comic strip.

Her play takes the Goldberg family, which for so many years has been familiar to radio listeners, and let them come alive for a couple of hours on the stage. Each scene, and there are seven of them, might be a chapter in an etherized serial. The entire company has no particular plot, but is a season in the life of a family.

The Goldbergs move uptown to the Bronx and meet a new collection of neighbors. Jake wants to quit his job as a sample maker and go into business for himself. Molly works on a theory that women's clothes do not have to fit so badly and runs a hospitable, devoted household.

The daughter, Rosie, wants to be a pianist and, more than that, hopes to have a piano of her own. Her brother, Sammy, is involved in school and his oncoming Bar Mitzvah.

It is the day of getting KDKA on the crystal radio set, eating a Charlotte Russe in a cardboard cup and hollering down the dumbwaiter shaft.

The ups and downs of the family are entirely normal. They tug at your emotions, because they are so recognizable.

Molly is determined to make a match between Rosie's piano teacher and Jake's shy friend, Mendel. Uncle David buys a piano for the little girl, and breaks her father's heart because he could not afford it, and "wanted that pleasure."

Rich Cousin Simon refuses to help Jake out until he recognizes a sure thing. And Jake has the sure thing only after he has won and lost some investors in a dress manufacturing business which Molly's research with a tape measure has made sound practical.

The other tenants are cordial and dictatorial, and Molly proves herself a fine civic figure by enrolling her neighbors in a night school, because she does not want her children to read and write so much better than she does.

All these matters roll along with great good will and a series of laughs that reflect the economical jab of Miss Berg's radio writing. She is at her best in a gay, sly humor, for the serious moments are static. Though her story is rooted in the family's Jewish tradition, any many of her jokes are idiomatic, the play never seems particularly special. It could be about any warm, ambitious family.

The author and leading lady reveals no great sophistication as an actress. More important than any stage tricks are her deep knowledge of her characters and her assurance of what she wants her play to do. She moves easily and articulately through the comedy, a pillar of gentle determination and a quiet, confident manipulator of destiny.

Philip Loeb is more professional than the others, and he expertly keys up the role of Jake, which continues in an even, harassed mood.

There is appropriate casting through the rest of the play. Most of the actors have a friendly naivete in their performances, and it is an innocence that adds to the amosphere.

Eli Mintz is an understanding Uncle, and John Laser and Lester Carr acquit themselves brightly as the children. Margaret Feury and David Opatoshu are in perfect character as the young lovers.

Harry Horner has given the show a set that lets its activities move freely without ever relaxing their cramped chumminess.

Journal and American

February 27, 1948

A Delightfully Corny Play That May Last

By ROBERT GARLAND

Arriving on the heels of the just too frightfully brilliant banalities of Noel Coward's Mayfairies at the National, the just too unfrightfully commonplace humanities of Gertrude Berg's Bronxites at the Belasco are a relief.

They're also a professional playgoer's comfort. Even the author-actress' deliberate non-smartness where her conversations, customs and costumes are concerned, are on the credit side of last night's premiere on 44th st.

Miss Berg, of the celebrated "soap-opera"—no Goldberg variation of which I happen to have heard, must have retired to the privacy of some friendly corncrib to assemble the script of her dramatized air-show now known as 'Me and Molly."

What's more, she and Ezra Stone must have rehearsed and directed it in a silo. So replete is it with the maize of human kindness that it's liable to remain awhile in the temple of the drama constructed by Ole Massa Dave Belasco.

I don't say it will. I don't say it won't. But I do say that it could turn out to be what Variety has called a "sleeper." An easy-going bid for the casual playgoer's patronage, there's a corny glow of well-being about it...

Along with an audience that never gave a second thought to Noel Coward, I found relief and comfort in it.

* * *

A Big Heart

This "Me and Molly" has a heart far bigger than its story. But such story as there is treats of Molly's husband, Jake, and his going into business with an uncertain Mr. Mendel. And of Mr. Mendel's Vera Wertheimer.

According to Mr. Goldberg, Mr. Mendel has a suppressed desire to be a designer of ladies' half-size dresses for the Grand Concourse cash and carriage trade. According to Mr. M. himself, he has a yen to own a drugstore.

You who've listened-in to the Goldbergs need not be told that Me, who's Mr. Goldberg, and Molly, who's Mrs. Goldberg, moved up to the Bronx in 1919. And there and then is where and when the comedy of character unfolds.

Through the nostalgia of distance, its fabricated cheerfulness - into - tearfulness - into-cheerfulness-again assumes a disarming folksiness. Such pleasant people, these well-intentioned Goldbergs and their well-intentioned neighbors!

And, as "Me and Molly" goes uneventfully on its way, you get to know Molly and Jake, their Rosie and Sammy, their Cousin Simon and Uncle David, their neighbors and other furniture, especially their Rosie's new mahogany piano...

When that upright instrument comes proudly through the window, you're almost as thrilled as they are!

* * *

Comedy of Character

A comedy of character rather than of action, the acting at the Belasco is the thing. As sole author and leading lady of "Me and Molly," Gertrude Berg acts beautifully by seeming not to act at all. Molly, she throws away!

Miss Berg's Molly is either a masterpiece of under-acting or a masterly self-portrait footlighted on a stage. Her Mrs. Goldberg at the Belasco is the antithesis of Gertrude Lawrence's Mrs. Gow at the National. Thanks!

Next in my affection is the Uncle David of Eli Mintz. Mr. Mintz is making his uptown debut after numerous successes in the Yiddish-speaking theatres downtown. He's a welcome addition to the English-speaking stage.

Lester Carr and Joan Laser, the Sammy and Rosie of the Goldbergs on parade, are young performers before whom an adult needn't cringe. Refugees from radio, Palestine and the Police Athletic League, they're fun to see and hear.

The others, I imagine, are as they should be, although the Jake Goldberg of Philip Loeb seems somewhat off the key. Harry Horner's setting, a "Voice of the Turtle" apartment adapted to the Bronx, and Ezra Stone's direction, serve...

Composed in a corn-crib, assembled in a silo, suppose "Me and Molly" is good and corny. What's wrong with good corn, anyway?

"Where Stars Walk"

The Dublin Gate Theater Company is playing a limited repertory engagement. Except for their initial presentation space permits us to reproduce only four newspaper reviews of each presentation.

DAILY NEWS

February 25, 1948

'Stars Walk' a Pleasant Fantasy

By JOHN CHAPMAN

After a tussle with one of Bernard Shaw's talkier comedies, "John Bull's Other Island," and a good stiff bout with Denis Johnston's expressionistic drama, "The Old Lady Says 'No,'" Dublin's Gate Theatre players have settled comfortably into "Where Stars Walk."

This play, by Micheal Mac Liammoir, dwells in what the author himself calls the Celtic twilight; it is an enjoyable fantasy in which a princess and an ancient king of Ireland turn up as a pair of servants in the home of a Dublin actress. They are a moonstruck couple, and they were very well played last evening at the Mansfield by Helena Hughes and Mr. Mac Liammoir.

The fantasy gets its theme and its title from a verse by Yeats about the land of Faery, "where stars walk upon a mountain top." It runs a bit to talk, but is well made; Mr. Mac Liammoir puts his ancient lovers in a normal, present-day household and lets the sense of predestination creep pleasantly upon them.

Good, but a Bit Odd.

They are a little odd, but good servants nevertheless; Eileen has the admirable ability of answering a call from her mistress before her mistress has uttered the call, and she goes into a faint now and then—but on the whole she is a very good parlor maid until she decides to go with her lover to where stars walk.

Melody and charm are in the author's writing, yet he does not go into Hibernian paroxysms of poesy. He speaks quite hardheadedly upon occasion, and spends quite a lot of time—a bit too much, perhaps—on the character of a visiting English journalist who finds Ireland quaint. He is more of a burlesque Englishman than was the visiting Briton in the Shaw play.

The Gate players are at their best in this latest of their offerings. Miss Hughes is pallid, red-haired, wraith-like and very appealing as the girl, and the author plays the manservant quietly and with a fine balance between the normally human and the star-haunted. Meriel Moore has graceful authority as the actress. Nora O'Mahony gets plenty of routine Irish funny-business into the role of a housekeeper, and Denis Brennan, Edward Golden, Nigel Brunton and the others help make an entertaining evening which has its moments of beauty and imagination.

'WHERE STARS WALK.'

"WHERE STARS WALK," at the Mansfield Theatre, A Dublin Gate Theatre production presented by Aldrich and Myers in association with Brian Doherty. Play by Micheal MacLiammoir. Directed by Hilton Edwards. Setting by Molly MacEwen.

THE CAST:

Sophia Sheridan	Meriel Moore
Robert Twomey	Denis Brennan
Ken Dillon	Ray Irving
Tommy Millington	Edward Golden
Sheila McCann	Patricia Kennedy
Mrs. Dempsey	Nora O'Mahony
Eileen	Helena Hughes
Martin	Micheal MacLiammoir
Nigel Brandon	Norman Barrs

New York World-Telegram

February 25, 1948

'Where Stars Walk' a Charming Fantasy

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

It is a curiously divided mood that pervades "Where the Stars Walk," a comedy which the Dublin Gate Theater is presenting this week. Against an atmosphere of sophistication and good humor there is enacted a pure fantasy of an ancient Irish legend.

The ingenuous Celtic love of fancy is treated at times with a worldly attitude that is entirely objective. At other moments a romantic myth is represented as awesome fact.

The switches take place with childlike simplicity. They are not to be explained, but accepted, or the play goes out the window. It is easier and much more enjoyable just to accept them.

In the Dublin home of a retired actress, Sophia Sheridan, an intellectual group is preparing a play. It concerns an Irish goddess who comes to earth to live as a mortal at Tara. In time her immortal lover finds her, and in the form of swans they fly off to a magic land of happiness.

Into the glib company which is rehearsing there comes a wan little chambermaid who is mystified and seriously disturbed at memories brought back to her by the mention of the goddess.

The actress' dabbling into spirit writing further upsets her. And this hobby seems responsible for the arrival of a manservant who applies for a job he did not know was open.

Each of the strange pair has had dreams of being followed on long walks by the stars, until one stood still where he was to find a face that promised to be familiar.

Finally the girl is sent to see the play, and bitterly criticizes it to the actress as having no real feeling of the struggle she remembers when the goddess had to decide between her earthbound and immortal loves.

The girl makes her decision and disappears with the man of all work. A moment later the actress sees two swans rising toward the stars.

Actually the legend, as it is brought to life through this simple pair, is heavily outbalanced in the play by the deliberately charming clatter of the playmakers. The actress, with her susceptibility to spirits, is a link between the groups. But the poetry of the legend is presented only in rare brief scenes.

The professionals continue their chatter most of the time with an air of sophistication that is not supported by their remarks. The passages in which the Irish just manage to tolerate an English boor are caustic but obvious, and the laughs generated by a housekeeper's choosing to be deaf are distressingly unoriginal.

The fact is that there is just too much of this airy drawing-room banter to make up for the lack of plot and the absence of conflict. There is suspense through the long first act, chiefly concerning what melding will come of the contrasted elements of the play.

That it never comes is not particularly important. One feels, though, that these people should have been more moved by their intimate contact with living legend.

Perhaps their failure to be touched hints at a modern desuetude, but it makes for an unsubstantial play.

The scenes involving the two servants and their struggle with the myth grow in ecstasy through the intense playing of Helena Hughes and Michael MacLiammoir, the author of the Gate's offering.

Meriel Moore has a smoothness which can toss off the actress' delicate affectation, then respect her mysticism. Nora O'Mahony keeps the housekeeper moving and prattling and Patricia Kennedy is a hefty and cranky reporter.

Edward Golden plays easily as the solemn playwright and Norman Barrs makes the Londoner duly eager and obtuse.

When it is not too waggish and wordy, the performance has an artless simplicity about it that is refreshing.

The Sun

February 25, 1948

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Legendary and Very Special.

The Dublin Gate Theater, which will not continue its New York engagement beyond next week because of meager box office returns, put on the fragile, haphazard and ambling fantasy called "Where Stars Walk" at the Mansfield last night. This is another piece by Micheal MacLiammoir, who plays one of the leading roles.

"Where Stars Walk" is again a play for a very special clientele, and it again reveals MacLiammoir in a speculative, contemplative and mystical mood. He puts considerable feeling and charm, if not too much play, into his mingling of modern Dublin life with Irish folk fantasy, and as he retells a portion of the centuries-old legend of Etain and Midhir.

In "Where Stars Walk" two figures out of ancient Irish lore, Etain, the Celtic princess, and the minstrel, Midhir, are reincarnated as a servant girl and a man-of-all-work in a Dublin home. They exert something of a spell over the household; their presence is strongly felt, and the mysterious scent of hawthorn is all over the house. Finally, Etain agrees to go back with her Midhir to the world beyond. When they are last seen they are white swans soaring against the tall sky.

Helena Hughes gives a sensitive, tremulous performance as the Etain who is accepted as the house girl, Eileen, but she is disturbingly more than that to the ex-actress, Sophie Sheridan, who owns the house and is interested in physical research. The role of Miss Sheridan is played with unsommon skill and restraint by Meriel Moore. Micheal MacLiammoir, becoming more ingratiating as we get to know him, gives a well worked out performance as the reincarnated Midhir. There is an amusing characterization from Norman Barrs as a bumptious Englishman and good performances from Nora O'Mahony and Edward Golden.

"Where Stars Walk" is a play that goes in for inner meanings in its re-creation of the Irish legends and it is frequently nebulous and now and then a little tedious. It also has some humor and quaintness and definitely a spiritual quality.

For all that, it remains a fantasy for a very special public. And the Dublin Gate Theater, is learning, somewhat ruefully, that such a public, in sufficient paying numbers, doesn't exist in the world of the Broadway theater.

Daily Mirror

February 25, 1948

'Where Stars Walk' Is Delightful

By ROBERT COLEMAN

After a fumbling start with "John Bull's Other Island" and "The Old Lady Says 'No!,'" the Dublin Gate Theater got around to showing us how it earned its artistic reputation with a delightful production of Michael MacLiammoir's "Where Stars Walk."

MacLiammoir has adroitly blended fantasy and satire into a charming play. He introduces us to a group of Dublin sophisticates who have forgotten how to approach the Ireland of legend and leprechauns until they are taught the way by a miraculous revelation.

Sophie Sheridan, retired actress and mistress of a literary salon, decides to put on a fantasy for charity. She and her worldly associates are disturbed to see the story of their play acted out in her household with a genuineness they cannot achieve.

"Where the Stars Walk" has a confusing first act for those of us not familiar with Irish folklore as we should perhaps be. But that somewhat baffling first canto is both eloquently and amusingly explained in the two that follow.

The second act is a joy. The retired actress is visited by an interviewer from a London paper. The British reporter wants ever so much to understand and appreciate the quaintness of Ireland and his endeavors to do so form one of the most hilarious episodes ever to escape a Beatrice Lillie revue.

The interplay between the Irish and British intelligentsia is gorgeous. The Irish, who have been patronizing their past and present, are aided to relish it more by their drawing room adventure.

These satiric passages are beautifully played by Meriel Moore, as the Dublin hostess, and Norman Barrs, as the agreeable obtuse British correspondent. Miss Moore, reminding you more than a little of Miss Lillie, is as sharp as a surgeon's scalpel.

Other outstanding performances are contributed by Denis Brennan, Roy Irving, Edward Golden, Patricia Kennedy, Nora O'Mahony, Helena Hughes and author MacLiammoir.

The Mansfield Theatre was really a most pleasant place in which to be last evening, as the Dublin visitors wiped away memories of their two previous essays into mediocrity. Why, oh why, didn't the Gate group launch their New York engagement with "Where Stars Walk"?

"Hedda Gabler"

The American Repertory Theatre is playing a limited repertory engagement. Except for their initial presentation space permits us to reproduce only four newspaper reviews of each presentation.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

February 25, 1948

By Otis L. Guernsey Jr.

100% Le Gallienne

EVA LE GALLIENNE'S second Ibsen revival is, like the first, a somewhat trying expedition into the theatrical past. As an early example of realistic theater, and as a play which touched on certain nineteenth century social tabus, "Hedda Gabler" must have been exciting in its own time. Revived at the Cort, however, in a production translated and directed by Miss Le Gallienne and supervised by Margaret Webster, it seems a somber static piece which presses and holds a few low notes in the scale of human behavior. The play serves as a vehicle for a typical Le Gallienne performance as a bored, selfish, cruel woman, but that is all it has to offer in this Louis J. Singer-American Repertory Theater version.

The star's costumes descend the color scale from pink to purple to black in Ibsen's three acts, as the newly married Hedda becomes bored with her elderly scholarly husband, destroys her former lover and his promising book and ascends to final melodrama. On two or three occasions she makes Hedda come to life as a sardonic woman whose laughter is always vicious and whose hateful, cowardly nature sometimes breaks through her rigid self-control. For the most part, though, one can see that it is just Miss Le Gallienne up there, play-acting with her familiar clasping of hands, shaking of shoulders and angling of the head. She always makes her presence felt on the stage; but

'HEDDA GABLER.'

HEDDA GABLER, the Henrik Ibsen play. Translated and staged by Eva Le Gallienne; production supervised by Margaret Webster; revived by Louis J. Singer and the American Repertory Theatre. At the Cort Theatre.

Miss Juliana Tesman	Marion G. Evensen
Berta	Merle Maddern
George Tesman	Robert Burbank
Hedda Tesman	Eva Le Gallienne
Mrs. Elvsted	Emily McNair
Judge Brack	Herbert Berghof
Eilert Lovborg	Efrem Zimbalist Jr.

"Hedda Gabler"—*continued*

between Hedda Gabler and Eva Le Gallienne, the latter is the dominant personality.

* * *

The production is very much a frame for the star. It is paced very slowly, giving her plenty of time to bring out hidden meanings in Ibsen's dialogue or to gloat over her lover's masterpiece before consigning it to the flames. The work can hardly have been cut at all, and it seems rooted to the furniture, with Miss Le Gallienne draping velvet over a footstool or Herbert Berghof taking a distinguished, cross-legged position on the sofa. The play depends on how terrible it seems to be a woman who laughs at her husband and does not want a child; how much of a sin it can be to drink one too many and spend a riotous night on the town. Without exceptionally revealing acting or staging, this does not seem very terrible at the Cort.

Berghof plays Judge Brack, a bon vivant who has one brief electric moment in this revival, and Robert Emhardt is a ludicrous enough figure as Hedda's fussy, conventional, academic husband. Marion G. Evensen has a good bit as a well-meaning aunt; Efrem Zimbalist jr. plays Hedda's one-time lover; Emily McNair is the young woman who inspires his book, and Merle Maddern comes on and off as the maid. These various players never quite come together in the smooth, harmonious and purposeful artistic teamwork which often gives new meanings or recreates old ones in venerable scripts and thus justifies their reappearance on the modern stage. "Hedda Gabler" has merely been played for what is called "theater" in quotes; and unfortunately, its mannered drawing-room wickedness is no longer particularly theatrical.

The New York Times

February 25, 1948

'Hedda Gabler' Returns to the Stage

Having failed successfully to resurrect "Ghosts" last week, Louis J. Singer and the American Repertory Theatre tried again with Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler" last night at the Cort. The unhappy conclusion must again be that this "Hedda Gabler" lacks the power to come across the footlights and, leaves one with the impression that perhaps it should be left on the shelves of the library.

For much that Ibsen set out to probe in this play—his quest for an answer to the soul struggle of the aimless—now seems full of long arid stretches, of talk that has little value today and as played last night seemed dull indeed.

Eva Le Gallienne, whose translation is being used, is naturally playing the unhappy Ibsen heroine and she is playing it with understanding for its varied complexities. This role, which so many actresses have sought because of its opportunities, is largely within Miss Le Gallienne's grasp. As a woman of breeding who lacks a purpose in her life and hasn't the courage to face its responsibilities, Miss Le Gallienne is giving a Hedda of many colors. She is sprightly, gay, bored, bitter, nasty and tragic.

Yet Miss Gallienne, able to make an understandable human of Hedda, cannot carry the play itself through the evening. For this, perhaps, blame should be placed upon her direction of her supporting players as well as in the casting itself. The pace is annoyingly slow and the players are uneven.

As the naive, bourgeois George Tesman, Robert Emhardt is giving a curiously namby-pamby performance. He makes of Tesman—and, obviously, it is the way Miss Le Gallienne wishes it—a complete fool, a fool to the point where he is irritating. Efrem Zimbalist Jr. is somewhat lost as the distracted Eilert Lovborg, while Herbert Berghof's Judge Brack is played with an excess of the sinister. Indeed, the Cort's stage is full of detestable people but the tragedy leaves one unmoved.

L. F.

Journal and American

February 26, 1948

Eva Should Take It Back to the Museum

By ROBERT GARLAND

One way to pass the time agreeably these bleak Norwegian evenings at the Cort is to sit back, relax and, like sheep, count all the Hedda Gablers, good, bad and indifferent, you have seen leaping the Ibsenian hurdles of Henrik's 1890 problem play.

They range from Mrs. Patrick Campbell, your first, through Mrs. Fiske, Nance O'Neill, Mme. Nazimova, Clare Eames, Emily Stevens, Blanche Yurka, Ethel Barrymore, Mary Shaw, Lucille La Verne and Katina Paxinou, to Eva Le Gallienne, your last—you hope!

And their men, their George Tesmans, Judge Bracks and Eilert Lovborgs? Here the time-passing grows harder. But, with an effort and without a check on accuracy, this Hedda's George, that Hedda's Judge, and the other Hedda's Eilert return fitfully to mind.

George Arliss, Margaret Webster's father, Ben, Hobart Bosworth, John Mason, Frank Gillmore, Dodson Mitchell, Lionel Atwill, Dudley Digges, Roland Young, Frank Conroy, Louis Calhern, Frederick Worlock, Charles Townsend, Donald Cameron, Fritz Lieber and—

And now, before your half-closed eyes, Robert Emhardt, Herbert Berghof and the junior Efrem Zimbalist.

Perennial Pistol

Woman and girl, Eva Le Gallienne has been demonstrating the debatable marksmanship of Henrik Ibsen's pistol-packing mamma for many a theatrical season. First, along about 1928, in her Civic Repertory Theatre with Paul Leyssac as George Tesman.

Since then, for two iconoclastic decades, she has refused to lay that pistol down. Ever so often, here, there and even in California, she has dug up Hedda Gabler, as a character and a play, and shot herself in the anteroom of her Christiana villa.

Night before last, while the Gate Theatre of Dublin was producing Micheal Mac Liammoir's "Where Stars Walk" at the Mansfield, Miss Le Gallienne was once more reproducing Henrik Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler" at the Cort. Last night I went and saw it.

So, after counting Heddas and discounting Hedda's men, I can tell you that, as sponsored by Louis J. Singer and The American Repertory Theatre with Eva Le Gallienne directing and acting the title role, it's a museum piece which should return to the museum . . .

Frankly, it should have stood on the shelf where it belongs, away from earnest Eva's well-intentioned hands.

Not Among Best

Following "Ghosts" in Miss Le Gallienne's Henrik Ibsen festival, I'd say that "Hedda Gabler" is not so good a play but a little better acted. The star is less mannered as Mrs. Tesman than she was as Mrs. Alving, although her makeup is definitely ill-advised.

Herbert Berghof, turning from Pastor Manders to Judge Brack, pipes down considerably. Wearing a long cigaret-holder and a short zoot-suit, he's quite a ladies' man. As Eilert Lovborg, the rising young Norwegian writer, the junior Efrem Zimbalist is okay.

To Robert Emhardt falls the task of being Hedda Gabler's husband. Hiding behind a beautiful home-grown barb, he drives his wife to her boy friend, her pistol and her grave. Merle Maddern's is a buxom Berta; Marion Evensen's an amiable Aunt Julia.

Sitting back, relaxed, and counting all the Hedda Gablers you have seen, Eva Le Gallienne's is not among the best. In the 20 seasons which have passed since first I saw it, her Mrs. Tesman has grown more irksome and incredible. So has her play . . .

Broadway has need of an actress of Eva Le Gallienne's brilliant background. But her Hedda Gabler doesn't live there any more!

The Sun

February 25, 1948

'HEDDA GABLER'

Their schedule disrupted by the cold reception met by their revival of Henrik Ibsen's "Ghosts," Louis J. Singer and the guiding forces of the American Repertory Theater set Eva Le Gallienne to playing the Norwegian master's "Hedda Gabler" a week ahead of time last evening at the Cort Theater. Despite some fine moments, this production too is disappointing.

Thirteen years have passed since Miss Le Gallienne last let New Yorkers see her portrayal of Ibsen's famous and superbly drawn character. Even then there were some who felt that the noted play was beginning to show its age. Last night it was obvious that the crowded years between have taken a further toll. Hedda, bored, cruel, and a coward afraid of life, still remains one of the most unpleasant and the most vivid women ever created for the stage, but much has happened since Ibsen wrote this play of the early 1890s to date its theme, and a modern playgoer may be pardoned if impatience is now blended with his loathing of Hedda.

Miss LeGallienne in her triple capacity of translator, director and actress will have to shoulder at least some of the blame on this occasion. The pace and the pitch of the performance are such as to make the play's antiquity all too apparent and the moments of high theatrical excitement all too few.

Moreover, Miss LeGallienne's own playing as Hedda is a bit too studied. At times she depends too much on nervous pacing and the fluttering of her hands to score her points. It is always easy to detest Hedda as Miss LeGallienne creates her, but it is not always possible to believe in her completely. Miss LeGallienne's acting is superb, however, in the manuscript burning scene and in the scenes with the unstable Lovborg. Her support is uneven. Herbert Berghof makes the villianous Judge Brack suave, calculating and plausible. Efrem Zimbalist Jr. is properly tortured as Lovborg, and Marion G. Evensen makes the minor role of Aunt Juliana ring true. The George Tesman of Robert Emhart, however, is merely silly instead of dully naive, and Emily McNair is only occasionally convincing as Mrs. Elvsted.

The engagement is only a limited one and is due to end a week from Saturday.

HERRICK BROWN.

"Tonight at 8:30"

New York World-Telegram

February 24, 1948

Gertrude Lawrence Stars in 3 Sketches

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The second group of short plays in the "Tonight at 8:30" bill at the National turns out as an infinitely more amusing program than the first trio was.

The sketches have more point and substance, though they are inclined to sound thinly spread. Each seems somewhat too long for the delicate idea behind it. The company is acting more happily to a man.

Gertrude Lawrence finds more play here for her talents. Where she occasionally seemed negative last Friday, she is glowing with impertinent charm and acts with an acute touch.

She is called on for a wide variety of interpretations, which she proceeds to effect with wit and intelligence. In "Shadow Play" she is just about the most captivating creature who ever set foot on a stage.

Witty and Brittle.

The bill opens with a lark called "Hands Across the Sea" which is a witty examination of rattle brained titles. In one of those elegant households where trivial exclamatory gossip is a steady diet, Miss Lawrence returns the hospitality of a couple from Malaya who had once brightened her travels.

A stream of vaguely preoccupied friends trickles through the drawing room, and gushing telephone conversations interrupt any cohesive talk. Several dialogues continue at once, and the special guests are only occasionally remembered.

At last Miss Lawrence realizes that her visitors are not at all the people she thought they were, and only with violent searching of memory does she identify them as they leave.

The star is brittle, addle-pated, and utterly charming. Valerie Cossart and Philip Tonge are properly fish out of water as the guests, and Norah Howard securely projects a bluff friend.

"Fumed Oak" makes a sharp change of pace with its account of a turning worm. This concerns an unutterably horrible family, with Miss Lawrence portraying a shrewish slattern. She whines, demands and snivels, and manages to show on her face the whole sum of a selfish, demanding unpleasant existence. When she speaks of "my innocence" it is in a tone of pure wickedness.

Philip Tonge plays with great relish the suppressed gentleman who has saved up for 10 years to emancipate himself from his degrading surroundings. Norah Howard is a sturdy lump of a mother-in-law whose bluff is called firmly, and Valerie Cossart makes the child an unspeakable adenoidal fright.

Dream of Lost Love.

In "Shadow Play" a wife recaptures in a dream the love of her husband, which she has lost. Here Miss Lawrence wears several exquisite gowns, sings in her haunting manner, and dances with insinuating gaiety.

More than any of the others, this sketch displays her true magic in the theater as she creates a delicate intimacy with the audience. The sketch is also the best for Graham Payn, who is playing opposite her.

Plainly he is at his best in this purer musical comedy style, for he sings most pleasantly and dances with grace.

Miss Howard is a sympathetic friend and Miss Cossart a pert lady's maid. Sarah Burton and William Roerick play in proper style the pair who would break up the marriage.

The simple and easily managed sets by George Jenkins are perfectly suited to the fluid manner of the play.

This bill is a sharper one than the first, and has timeless quality about its comment and wit, although a little condensation would add vigor to each of the plays.

'TONIGHT AT 8:30.'

Three plays by Noel Coward; settings by George Jenkins; musical direction, Frank Tours; dances by Richard Barstow; staged by Noel Coward; presented by Home, Curran, Russell Lewis and Howard Young at the National Theater, Monday evening, February 23, 1948. The cast:

'Hands Across the Sea.'

Walters ..... Sarah Burton
Lady Maureen Gilpin (Piggie) ..... Gertrude Lawrence
Commander Peter Gilpin, R. N. ..... Graham Payn
Lieut.-Commander Alastair Corbett, R. N. ..... William Roerick
Mrs. Wadhurst ..... Valerie Cossart
Mr. Wadhurst ..... Philip Tonge
Mr. Burnham ..... Booth Colman
The Hon. Clare Wedderburn ..... Norah Howard
Major Gosling (Bogey) ..... Rhoderick Walker

'Fumed Oak.'

Doris Gow ..... Gertrude Lawrence
Mrs. Rockett ..... Norah Howard
Elsie ..... Valerie Cossart
Henry Gow ..... Philip Tonge

'Shadow Play.'

Lena ..... Valerie Cossart
Victoria Gayforth ..... Gertrude Lawrence
Martha Cunningham ..... Norah Howard
Simon Gayforth ..... Graham Payn
Hodge ..... Booth Colman
Sibyl Herton ..... Sarah Burton
Michael Doyle ..... William Roerick
A Young Man ..... Rhoderick Walker
George Cunningham ..... Philip Tonge

New York Herald Tribune

February 24, 1948

By HOWARD BARNES

Another Call for Noel

WHAT Noel Coward has termed "an unpleasant comedy in two scenes" comes off best in the second section of his "Tonight At 8:30," being revived in part at the National Theater. "Fumed Oak" is no great shakes, even as a short play. Its acid accolade to a turning worm in South London was far funnier a dozen years ago than it is today. But the great Gertrude Lawrence has set a mood for the skit and made it communicative. With the aid of Philip Tonge, as the rebellious notions counter salesman, Valerie Cossart and Norah Howard, the piece has dramatic excitement, if little consequence. The same can not be said for the other offerings on the bill.

* * *

"Shadow Play," for example, for all its haunting melodies, is merely an exercise in pretentious nonsense as it is now being performed. Once again Miss Lawrence brings her enduring gamin appeal and sure-footed stage presence to the work, but Coward should never have let so fugitive a romantic bit of fol-de-rol be revived without appearing in it himself. Graham Payn quite fails to keep the playlet enchanting, as an errant husband who is reconciled to his wife of five years on the eve of asking her for a divorce. Here is a charade which lacks the subtle nuances which would permit it to get a hearing in the theater proper.

* * *

What is most disconcerting about "Tonight At 8:30," is the fact that it has skipped such a brilliant offering as "Still Life," which inspired the fine motion picture "Brief Encounter," to include "Hands Across the Sea." This first exhibit in a trio of one-act shows has its moments, as a fluttery aristocratic matron quite fails to recognize the couple from Malaya whom she had invited to her house when they arrived in London. But it is so slight that one expects the curtain to ring down at almost any time during the miniscule proceedings.

* * *

If the six plays of the original nine which are on view at the National leave something to be desired, it is the fault of the author, composer and director. His music is still very good and exceedingly nostalgic for some of us. His choice of pieces is lamentable, while his direction is no better than erratic. What is chiefly wanting is his participation in the productions. Miss Lawrence is superlative, in a variety of roles, but one cannot play charades all by oneself. "Tonight At 8:30" continues to be gravely disappointing.

Daily Mirror

February 24, 1948

'Tonight at 8:30': Part Two

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Homer Curran, Russell Lewis and Howard Young last evening presented the second half of "Tonight at 8:30," comprising Noel Coward playlets, at the National Theatre. Starred, of course, is Gertrude Lawrence.

The new bill includes "Fumed Oak," "an unpleasant comedy," best of all the Coward skits. It's a bitter, wry, yet amusing version of the fable of the worm that turned. A henpecked husband finally gives his nagging wife, sniveling brat and gosh-awful mother-in-law their come uppance.

For this little number the attractive Miss Lawrence has to make herself a hag of a wife. Norah Howard, Philip Tonge and Valerie Cossart are excellent in the other roles.

The opener is "Hands Across the Sea," a satire on globe-trotters who invite chance acquaintances to call on them at home and are baffled when they do. It is also a hilarious comment on the wacky, brittle pre-war London Mayfair set.

Third on the program is "Shadow Play," wherein a wife facing divorce takes an overdose of sleeping tablets, becomes delirious and recalls the happier moments of her life.

This offers Miss Lawrence the opportunity to trot out some song-and-dancing from her musical comedy days. She's ably assisted with the melodies and steps by Graham Payn. Miss Howard and Tonge also have effective moments.

Though a majority of the first-nighters appeared to relish Miss Lawrence's musical comedy whirls, we thought "Shadow Play" the least entertaining of the three sketches on the bill. It was, for us, a puffed-up, pretentious inducement to yawns.

"Tonight at 8:30," second section, has like its predecessor, been beautifully staged by author Coward. A tickler for detail, one who demands perfection even in trifles, Coward has demonstrated with these bubbly playlets his masterly showmanship.

George Jenkins has achieved sets that are tasteful and atmospheric, blending suggestion with the fewest possible materials. Smart, in fact, would be the word for the "Hands Across the Sea" and "Shadow Play" backgrounds.

Presiding over the pit orchestra is Frank Tours, who has wielded the baton for many of our biggest musical comedy hits.

"Tonight at 8:30" permits Miss Lawrence to display her amazing range, as well as her vibrant personality. It is worth reviving so that we may have her back with us this season. Broadway is a bright place when she's around.

The Sun

February 24, 1948

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

A Better Coward Night.

The second group of Noel Coward's short plays gives Gertrude Lawrence and her company brisker material than they had in Friday's opening bill and last night's show at the National was far better. The observation must still be made, however, that Coward's place is not in Row F but right up there on the stage. Is it too late for such a transfer?

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"Hands Across the Sea," a merciless satire, is adroitly played and got last evening's proceedings off to a bright start. "Fumed Oak" sags considerably without Coward, but "Shadow Play," which concludes the program, is charmingly wistful and sentimental and Miss Lawrence gets graceful assistance from Graham Payn, who dances well and knows how to wear his evening clothes.

Miss Lawrence has a romp in "Hands Across the Sea," that devastating piece about the delightfully vague Lady Maureen Gilpin who is unable to recall the names of a visiting couple who had entertained her handsomely in Malaya. Valerie Cossart is very amusing as the somewhat bewildered Mrs. Wadhurst of the Far East, and Philip Tonge is particularly good as the uncomfortable husband, whose drop-in visit is one of acute misery. Coward, in his fun-making at the expense of these awkward and helpless Colonials, is as savage as he ever gets to be.

The bitter sketch, "Fumed Oak," picturing the drabness of day-to-day existence in the home of a Cockney clerk, was something of a minor masterpiece when Coward appeared in it a dozen years ago, but is considerably less effective with the theater's jack-of-practically-everything on the sidelines. Philip Tonge substitutes as the worm-turning Henry Gow, who strikes out for his freedom after years of abuse, and Miss Lawrence again contributes her caustic characterization as the raffish wife.

The fantasy, "Shadowy Play," which depicts in song and story the reconciliation of a Mayfair couple who were dangerously near divorce, introduces two of Coward's pleasant songs, "You Were There" and "Play, Orchestra, Play." This "Shadow Play" is a fragile theater piece that creates and sustains a romantic mood. Miss Lawrence is disturbingly lovely as Victoria Gayforth, who succeeds in holding the husband she loves.

So that's the six of the Coward short plays—three last Friday and three last night—that will be given by Miss Lawrence's company during the National engagement. There's a job open for Coward in "Fumed Oak" if he wants to go to work. I'm told that he had a better time as a spectator last evening than he did on Friday. We all did.

The New York Times

February 24, 1948

Gertrude Lawrence in Three More of the Short Plays by Noel Coward

By BROOKS ATKINSON

To the doleful words that appeared in this space last Saturday add a few more. The second set of Mr. Coward's short plays, put on at the National last evening, is no better than the first set that was put on last Friday. Although Gertrude Lawrence is a superwoman, she cannot restore a world that has been lost, and none of us can recapture the enchantments or the values that seemed to fill the theatre with magic twelve years ago.

Like the first set of plays, the second has one durable number. If you remember the venomous triumph of a London shop drudge in "Fumed Oak," you will doubtless enjoy this corrosive sketch again. After the limp smartness of "Hands Across the Sea," which used to be effervescent, the harshness of "Fumed Oak" is a stimulating astringent with its ghastly portrait of domestic ugliness and hatefulness.

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Miss Lawrence, who has just been trailing robes of dazzling fashion in "Hands Across the Sea," acts the slatternly shrew of "Fumed Oak" with skill and integrity, sketching the character swiftly by scuffing her shoes and angrily rattling a newspaper. Although the part is not brilliant, the acting is. And Philip Tonge, who has been a tower of strength through this whole misguided enterprise, plays the part of the turning worm with a malicious pleasure that is soundly contrived and is admirable.

But that concludes the pleasures of the current bill. "Hands Across the Sea" used to be a devastating sketch of a smart London hostess who does not recognize some Britishers who were her hosts in Malaya when she was traveling. As in many of his plays, Mr. Coward lops off every head in the cast—slaying the smartly rude Londoners, whom he likes, as well as the dull colonials, whom he loathes.

The mercurial Miss Lawrence gives a bland and neatly pointed performance that is at once efficient and amusing. Again, Mr. Tonge is excellent as the lugubrious and apprehensive colonial. But this is the sort of sketch that needs the electricity of Mr. Coward's acting. "If I had known a lot of colonial strangers were coming trumpeting into the house"—that is the sort of line that needs Mr. Coward's arrogant style of comedy acting, and "trumpeting" is the key word.

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"Shadow Play," which concludes the program, is a mannered, pretentious fantasy with some tawdry music and some ballroom dancing that should be reverently laid away in an old attic trunk. Although the Gayforths of Mayfair may have been hot stuff twelve years ago, they are tiresome ninnies today. Even our glamorous superwoman cannot conjure the dullness out of those sentimental shadows now.

New York Post

February 24, 1948

Second Coward Evening Superior to First

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

As predicted, not altogether exclusively, in these columns, the second program of the Noel Coward Carnival called "Tonight at 8:30," which was unveiled at the National Theatre last night, proved considerably more effective than the earlier bill. Consisting of "Hands Across the Sea," "Fumed Oak" and "Shadow Play," it offers three contrasting plays, which are, in their separate fashions, little masterpieces. Since the third work also provides Graham Payn, who has been rather severely criticized for not being Noel Coward, with his most satisfying role, I thought the entire evening went off extremely well.

Strangely enough, it was "Fumed Oak," which had originally seemed the short play most likely to achieve lasting audience popularity, that emerged last night as the least engaging of the three. The "unpleasant comedy," as the author calls it, about the turning worm of a husband, who walks out on his nagging wife and her horrible family, continues to be a lot of good, malicious fun. Furthermore, Gertrude Lawrence is something to see as the slattern of a wife, and Philip Tonge, the most valuable of the supporting cast, is excellent as the rebel. But, for all that, "Fumed Oak" now seems inferior to the works surrounding it.

As for "Hands Across the Sea," I thought it was the funniest, brightest and most devastating of them all when I first saw it, and I am now more convinced of this than ever. The tale of two unhappy colonials from Malaya, who drop in on a vague and preoccupied London lady they had been kind to on her travels, only to find that she doesn't remember who on earth they are, it is one of the most brilliantly satirical comedies of bad manners I can think of. Miss Lawrence is particularly delightful in it, and there is a hilarious performance by Mr. Tonge as the outrageously treated colonial husband.

The final item, "Shadow Play," has always been one of my favorites. The story of a wife who finds her marriage breaking up and, in the delirium of a drugged sleep, relives her happy courtship, it captures a truly romantic mood and succeeds in being oddly touching. In addition, it has a fine score in its dream sequence. I think the song called "You Were There" is lovely enough to be grouped with such celebrated Coward musical numbers as "Some Day I'll Find You" and "I'll See You Again," which is my idea of high praise indeed.

Of course, Miss Lawrence is a joy in everything she does. To play the slovenly drab of "Fumed Oak," the scatterbrained hostess of "Hands Across the Sea," and the heart-broken wife of "Shadow Play" with such variety and unfailing skill is surely one of the season's feats in virtuoso acting. As I have said, both Mr. Tonge and Mr. Payn are helpful, even though they can't make us forget how valuable the playing of Mr. Coward was. There is also good work by Norah Howard and Valerie Cossart.

Now that the six plays have been seen on two evenings, it strikes me that my contention last Sunday that Noel Coward is, for all his brittleness and snobbery, a comic writer of genuine distinction, whose style and wit are as impressive as his versatility, has been justified. Personally I am sorry that the deeply moving "Still Life," which was made into an excellent British film called "Brief Encounter," was not revived, and I didn't find the previous bill altogether satisfying, but Mr. Coward comes out of "Tonight at 8:30" handsomely.

DAILY NEWS

February 24, 1948

'Tonight at 8:30,' Second Series, Old Hat Except for 'Fumed Oak'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In the second and final set of Noel Coward's "Tonight at 8:30" sketches, which were presented last evening at the National Theatre, Gertrude Lawrence again shows herself as an actress of charm and accomplishment and Graham Payn is a leading man who can wear a dressing gown more stylishly than anybody this side of Clifton Webb.

The one who is beginning to show the wear and tear of the years is not, heaven forbid, the luminous Miss Lawrence, who can talk and walk and sing and wear clothes with such fine style; he is either this playgoer or Mr. Coward.

I found attending two of last night's three sketches rather an effort, like trying to get a bang from the leftovers of an old Elsa Maxwell party which I'd never been to but had only read about. The champagne left in the bottom of the glass had gone flat. It no longer amused me that Lady Maureen Gilpin should be nicknamed Piggie or that Major Gosling should be called Bogey.

"Fumed Oak" Best.

The one sketch I did have some affection for is "Fumed Oak," which is the one about the middle-class Turning Worm who, after years of silent suffering, tells his wife, daughter and mother-in-law that he is leaving them. Since they are thoroughly unpleasant people, and since he is such a worm, this number is satisfying, and Philip Tonge plays it well.

The first of the playlets, "Hands Across the Sea," is an interminably impolite little affair in which everybody ignores everybody else. I guess it was very smart once, because look where Noel Coward has got. The last of them, "Shadow Play," is about a couple whose marriage is saved when the wife takes three sleeping pills instead of two and, in consequence, has some dreams which make everything all right again. Charming, I guess. But the wear and tear of the years is beginning to tell on me, and I was not quite enthralled.

I'll be enthralled any time, though, that Miss Lawrence and Mr. Payn present the first half of their repertory bill and enact the honestly vulgar "Red Peppers" sketch, forgetting what was smart talk half a generation ago.